

## Graphic Turn. Like the Ivy on the Wall



JULIO LE PARC  
*La tortura en Argentina*, 1972.  
Archivo Graciela Carnevale

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**ORGANIZATION:** Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía

**CURATORSHIP:** Red Conceptualismos del Sur

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At the beginning of the last decade, Museo Reina Sofía initiated a process of collaboration with the Red Conceptualismos del Sur (RedCSur) -Southern Conceptualisms Network-, an international research platform that tries to "act in the field of epistemological, artistic and political disputes of the present", from what they describe as a "plural South-South positioning". That collaboration gave rise to the exhibition, *Losing the Human Form. A Seismic Image of the 1980s in Latin America*, held at the museum from October 26, 2012 to March 11, 2013, and which generated an extensive program of formative activities and editorial projects.

*Graphic Turn. Like the Ivy on the Wall* constitutes an expansion of that collaborative process and research. If *Losing the Human Form* focused on the period from 1973, the year of Pinochet's coup d'état, to 1994, when the Zapatista movement emerged, *Graphic Turn* broadens its temporal arc, extending from the 1960s to the present. In addition, the scope is extended to episodes in Latin America, the Caribbean and even in the United States -in relation to black and indigenous movements- and Europe -including as case studies internationalist campaigns denouncing human rights violations and censorship promoted by intellectuals based in European countries.



As stated in the exhibition catalogue by the coordinating team, "the initial driving force of this research was to investigate forms of street graphic action -understanding the term *graphic* in an expanded sense, or rather, exploded, which includes initiatives ranging from collective embroidery to cartographic exercise-, located in recent times and going back to some historical genealogies that occurred from the 1960s to the present, altering the temporal arc and affecting any linear narrative. In this sense, we are interested in the idea of *turn* not so much as a deviation or change of course, but rather as a revolt, both a challenge to power and an establishment's reversal".

The sections - grouped under the concepts of *Untimely graphics*, *Ayotzinapa*, *Insubordinate territories*, *Border crossing (Pasafronteras)*, *Persistences of memory*, *Arseñal*, *In secret*, *The delay* and *Counter-cartographies*, bring together and relate very diverse and distant cases, trying not to impose a linear narrative, restricted to limited geographies.

In addition, two spaces called *Agora of the present* and *Cuir Library* have been created. The former includes references to very recent graphic actions -linked, for example, to the struggle for the decriminalization of abortion in Argentina or the constituent process in Chile- and, in the latter, the visitor can explore fanzines and independent publications.

## Untimely graphics

The untimely can be understood as what bursts into time to subvert the order of life. The installation *Violencia* (Violence), which Juan Carlos Romero presented at the Centro de Arte y Comunicación in Buenos Aires in 1973, explores this idea in a double sense. On the one hand, it thrusts the language and techniques of street graphics into the art world, where it inserts the public debate on the legitimacy of violence. On the other, it inaugurates a practice that has been transmitted, cited, and resignified since then at crossing points of art and politics.

By reusing or manipulating traditional typographies of wood and metal, contemporary graphic practices appropriate posters like Romero's and suggest a complex inter-generational web of shared transmission and practices. Graphic actions at different places and times are therefore taken as signs of a reversed or dislocated temporality. In an untimely fashion, they set up a dialogue between experiences and stores of knowledge, creating new relations and meanings between the present, past echoes, and impulses toward the future.

## Ayotzinapa

The detention and forced disappearance of 43 students of the Escuela Normal Raúl Isidro Burgos in Ayotzinapa (Guerrero, Mexico) in September 2014 gave rise to a welter of actions on the part of civil society both inside and outside the country.

The profuse graphic response to the occurrence has prominently accompanied several marches and proclamations in the public space, as well as on digital platforms, in publications, and even on the art circuit. Family members' organizations, activists, and also artists have helped to draw attention to the facts in various ways, from placards to embroidery, kites, monumental graffiti, and virtual devices.



FRANCISCO TOLEDO  
*Papalotes de los desaparecidos*, 2014.  
Centro de Documentación Arkheia, MUAC, UNAM-DiGAV

The multiplication of the students' faces, the repetition of slogans like "Alive they took them, alive we want them" or "It was the State", and the count from 1 to 43 ending with a cry of "Justice!" give shape to collective indignation at a still unresolved case that adds to the ominous figures of missing people in Mexico.

In suggesting search strategies or imagining tools for communication, protest, and mourning, these materializations linked to the case of Ayotzinapa have contributed visual and sound documents to the social demand for memory, justice, and truth.

## Insubordinate territories

‘Insubordinate territories’ refer to modes of resistance centered on space and its articulation with subjects and communities. Insubordination, which is expressed through a heterogeneous set of acts of resistance, also assumes sensitive and poetic forms with the ability to draw the non-conformist energy of individuals, collectives, and peoples who inhabit the home of a common tongue. It is an idea that moves away from the concept of ‘territory’ as a piece of land and gives rise to another that integrates the differences, scales, and forms of life inhabiting it.

Visual and graphic forms show the gifts of the territory and its interrelations. They help to expose the violation of its sustainability, and they recall gestures of resistance that oppose its destruction. An insubordinate territory can operate through micropolitics in rural or urban areas. It concentrates insubordinate tactics such as graphic inscriptions, stamps, marks, fabrics, posters, or even a small story that will be told many times to prevent it from disappearing completely and preserve the future.

## Border crossing



From the experience of *La Voz de la Mujer*, a feminist graphic cooperative formed by Bolivian and Paraguayan migrants in Argentina, the notion of a *pasafronteras* or ‘border crossing’ graphics arose. This refers to experiences that cross both geopolitical and epistemological borders to stand up against the precarity of life and string together memories of resistance.

The practices gathered here address these terms by passing through or blending one medium, technique, or place

in order to reach others: from the matrix to the copy, from the woodcut to embroidery, from one set of hands to others. In the same way as they ask where one population begins and ends, they also question the place of the image and graphic experience.

Transit across borders can be a form of survival, a gesture of resistance, and also an experience that enfolds territories, bodies, and lives inhabiting an old colonial wound. *Pasafronteras* graphics and its ways of piercing, knotting, and leaving a trace are counterposed to fences, barbed wire, and walls, and from below they collectively trace new maps with vibrating borders.

## **Persistences of memory**

Grouped under this concept is a set of practices and pieces that engage with collective action through the right to memory. Against the 'smudging over' of official history and prompted by the need to provide bodies for the murdered and missing people in their places of origin and beyond, countless graphic gestures are deployed to assert the singularity of a name, a gaze, or a voice, while at the same time depicting the magnitude of the humanitarian crisis.

A reference to the persistence of memory within the framework of graphic practice signals a genealogy of the relations between art and politics centered on historical memory. These are relations in which different junctures have transformed ways of doing things, repeatedly recovering traditions, techniques, visual strategies, or slogans that have emerged from the struggle not to forget and the hope that the missing will appear alive. These bold new actions materialize, through their own performativity and technical media, the persistence of those figures that are referential from their communities who have been killed or spirited away.

## **Arseñal**

This neologism, which comes from a cross between the military concept of the 'arsenal' and the communications term 'señal' (signal), gives a name to a set of visual devices characterized by their availability for public use. Although all the objects which make up Graphic Turn have been testimonies to political acts, a dialogue is established in the case of Arseñal between materials preserved precisely for repeated use in this type of contexts.

These materials are photographs, placards, flags, banners, and referential signs of social memory that were kept, reused, and resignified by citizens in different spaces and at different historical moments. The cases shown in this room explore this waiting or latent potential, which makes it possible to activate them at the right moment.

## **Graphic bodies. Matrices for a street choreography**

Graphic bodies include a set of visual and performative artifacts that introduce neglected or devalued procedures and materials on the margins of canonical graphics and its technological and institutional protocols.

Nothing is more fragile than a cardboard matrix that will be used again and again to mark a wall, a street, a T-shirt, or any other support that will multiply its image. This portable artifact is inscribed in an economy of recycling and a 'do it yourself' policy.

Such actions respond to a call to gather around an event, a denunciation, or a demand. Their production is geared towards physical or electronic circulation and an attempt to socialize

resources, procedures, and approaches. Graphic bodies trace their polyphonically voiced choreographies in the streets.

### **Timeline. Nicaraguan graphics from Sandinism to the present**

In Nicaragua, graphics emerged as a tool in the democratic struggle in the late 1970s, when anti-Somoza slogans or revolutionary graffiti started to appear on walls in cities.

As part of that process, the Taller de Gráfica Experimental (Experimental Graphics Workshop) was founded in 1984. Besides its teaching activity, it produced numerous artworks and provided consultancy for artists from Nicaragua and other countries working above all in silkscreen, woodcut, and linocut.

International solidarity with the Sandinist Revolution soon found articulation, spreading also to the field of the graphic arts. Among those initiatives, one worthy of special mention is Timeline: The Chronicle of U.S. Intervention in Central and Latin America, the influential show by the Group Material collective, which was presented at PS1 in New York in 1984. Its timeline structure is resumed for this presentation of the graphic (and political) history of Nicaragua from 1979 to the present.

The United States embargo, and the decline of the revolutionary project brought the closure of the Taller de Gráfica Experimental. In this context of dispersal and disenchantment, but also with the legacy of movements of solidarity and collective experiences, the 'Autonomous Cultural Zone' of ArteFacto appeared in 1990, establishing a multi-generational current that continues today. In 2018, a series of social revolts ended with the death of more than 300 people. Faced with the drift towards neoliberalism of a country that had attempted a revolution, the people burst out and took back the streets, and graphics once more became an urgent scream.

### **Graphic bodies. Plebeian images, minority forms**

Images are powerful political technologies that constitute the contours of the possible and the thinkable, and they operate in the administration of certain ways of life. Sexual dissidences displayed collectively or individually weave body and graphics together to invent open images. These activate other forms of the political and invert the senses established by the power of the majority and its means of subjection.

Deployed in the context of street actions, interventions, or performances, flyers, posters, photocopies, and fanzines help to ignite minority forms of desire for which no complete diagram of sense exists beforehand.

## **In secret**

This concept refers to a particular way of acting and circulating that establishes a correspondence between a withdrawal of the graphic gesture to an intimate scale and its critical trajectory across the public dimension of daily life.

When confronted in highly repressive contexts by ideological control and censorship, graphic art is transformed, arousing a different flow of ideas that keep the life force pulsating under the threat of abusive power. By opposition to the official language, these practices embody visible forms that resort to the cryptic or hermetic as something allowing them to be recognized by fellow members of a community. All this involves forms of circulation and access policies that are very different from those of the graphics that occupy the walls of the city, as they require a political and emotional management of distances.

The works gathered here propose relationships of trust, care, and complicity, invent codes so as (not) to be deciphered, and permit the survival of the different.

## **Counter-cartographies**



By opposition to cartography used as an instrument of power and control, 'counter-cartographies' are tools of denunciation, political struggle, and above all social transformation created in workshops or in collaboration with social movements.

The practices gathered here, produced by collectives like Grupo de Arte Callejero and Iconoclasistas (Argentina), Bureau d'Études (France) and

Redretro (Mexico), transgress the traditional discipline and its conventions to propose new uses and contents that signal the conditions to be transformed, reflecting hidden structures and inspiring new critical possibilities.

In its maps, 'counter-cartography' thus graphically evidences relationships of domination and exploitation, condensing complex sets of information to visualize jeopardized spaces and zones affected by various social and economic problems. They also vindicate policies of remembrance in view of the forgotten victims of State terrorism and other reiterated forms of violence.

## **The delay**

The delay alludes to a protracted way of producing images that introduces tension to an idea of political action determined by immediacy. The concept refers principally to practices like embroidery and weaving, where denunciation is linked to a slow and dislocated time scale opposed both to capitalist productivism and to the urgency with which other graphic responses surge up in the heat of protests.

The actions gathered here, performed in slow time over a long duration, become a space capable of fissuring routine and hosting an exercise in resistance, grief, and memory. Delayed graphics are also related to a polyphonic practice, a collective production of meaning with respect to concrete problematics.

Appreciable in this group of materials is a poetics under constant construction that overflows territorial, discursive, and formal frontiers. Replicated in different contexts with similar problematics, they demand creative initiatives that will contribute to opportune denunciation, necessary testimonies, and the construction of historical memory.

## **Agora of the present**

At a vertiginous historical moment, the Agora of the present is intended as a space for exchange and conversation and a soundbox for echoes of current conflicts, especially the many forms of resistance in Latin America.

Brought together here, among other types of street expression and graphic action, are the images of the Massacre of Curuguaty, which occurred in Paraguay in 2012; the popular demonstrations against the coup d'état of 2016 in Brazil and the denunciation of the violations of human rights that have occurred since then; the social outburst in Chile which has contested difficult living conditions, inequality, and structural violence since 2019; the National Strike in Colombia, which since 2020 has had a massive impact in Cali and other cities like Bogotá and Medellín; and the feminist wave that has spread around the world after the performance of the LASTESIS collective. Also seen is a selection of the graphic campaigns promoted by Red Conceptualismos del Sur, which denounce repression in Chile, Colombia, and Cuba, articulating collective and internationalist solidarity.

## **Cuir Library**

The cuir Library is intended as a counter-space and a heterotopia. It constitutes a political technology that works on the interruption and deconstruction of the “somatic fictions” which devices like the archive, the museum, or the library help to configure. It admits disorientation as a possibility for inhabiting the spaces in ways that cannot be anticipated in advance, but only by means of the passage (oblique, queer) through the room. The floor of the cuir Library is not only for walking on. We can also sit or lie down on it (to think, to laugh, to weep).

The publications can be touched, read, and shared. They involve collective modes of action that socialize and circulate graphic, expressive, and communicative resources. This reservoir is available for reuse in the production of new fanzines and published artifacts. Its 'unregistered' graphics, twisted or, as the Colombians say, choneta, are inscribed within a politics of 'do it yourself'. The cuir Library habilitates minority forms of political imagination for which conditions do not always exist to make them comprehensible. It brings together materials that anticipate a future sense yet to be invented, which they themselves help us to imagine.

## **Catalogue**

On the occasion of the exhibition, the Museo Reina Sofía has published a catalogue in Spanish with images of the exhibited material that includes an introduction by the coordinating team and specific texts on each of the concepts that form the backbone of this project, written collectively by the research team. It also includes the diagram designed by André Mesquita in which appear the connections and relationships between the different concepts and cases investigated in this project based on the idea of a circular temporality represented by the mythical feathered serpent, Quetzacoatl.

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